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ABSTRACT

In modern Western society, traditional structures and organizations from the first modernity, with its hierarchical models and well-structured and distinct components, are currently confronted by the individualization trends of the second modernity. This need for new structures is particularly apparent in present-day education. Education, in the second modernity, is still regarded as a vital agency for identity construction and a significant component of a national cultural policy. For restructuring upper secondary education in the Netherlands, this paper addresses bringing schools together in networks. Schools then learn from each other, analyze each other's practices, and develop various joint initiatives. The paper presents the author/educators' experiences and analyzes critical elements in creating and sustaining networks. It shows the correspondence among the political, the cultural, and the educational in contemporary Western societies, in particular the Netherlands. The paper discusses managing educational change, citing the changing secondary education in the Netherlands as the educational context in which the new network started and created a practice of change. It describes the network and outlines the functions of the network. The paper explains the organization and practice of the network, noting that currently 20 secondary schools have participated in the network. It discusses evaluation of the network, the network in its educational environment, developments in the network, and rules used in directing the network. (Contains 55 references.) (BT)

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NETWORKS OF SCHOOLS AND CONSTRUCTING CITIZENSHIP IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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In modern Western society, the traditional structures and organizations from the 'first modernity', with its hierarchical models and well-structured and distinct components, are today confronted by the individualization trends of the 'second modernity' (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994; Castells, 1996; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The 'second modernity' stresses the growing autonomy of individuals and individual organizations. Governments are being forced to find new ways to bring these relatively autonomous subjects and institutions together, and to change their own structures of leadership and control. This need for new structures is particularly apparent in present-day education. Education in the 'second modernity' is still regarded as a vital agency for identity construction and a significant component of a national cultural policy.

For restructuring upper secondary education in the Netherlands, we stimulate bringing schools together in networks. Schools learn from each other, analyze each other's practices and develop various joint initiatives. In this article we will present our experiences and analyze critical elements in creating and sustaining networks.

The political, cultural and educational climate

In this section we will show the correspondence between the political, the cultural and educational in contemporary Western societies, in particular the Netherlands.

Growing up in modern society

Growing up in modern society demands of youngsters that they have different knowledge, skills and attitudes than before. The amount of knowledge is growing rapidly; in a formal way it is easier to get entrance to knowledge. But getting access to knowledge is not the same as getting a more theoretical insight into knowledge. Students have to learn to construct their own working theories; they have to give their own meaning to the outer world. The growing amount of knowledge and the fast changing character of knowledge, asks for youngsters who can construct their own meaning and can build their own theory. In these construction processes, they use the cultural notions and commodities they find in their surrounding world and in the media. In giving a personal and authentic meaning to their life, they position themselves in their social world.

But in modern society, youngsters also have to find a way to adapt and to participate in social processes: in their own community and in the global world. However, both these communities and the global world are changing rapidly. Through the growing mobility of people, both the local communities and the global world are becoming more multicultural, even if there are still processes of ethnic segregation. Modern society also needs citizens that contribute actively to maintaining and transforming society.

In present-day society, youngsters have a greater responsibility for finding their own way in the social world. But this responsibility is not a choice: to survive in society

means to get actively involved, to take your own responsibility (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1992; Dieleman et al. 1999).

Bringing ideology back into the educational discourse

To a certain extent, the described development of society and identities seems a natural process. A process that has its own logic and that is not based in different ideologies. However, ideologies give their own signification to the more general trend, they propose their own solutions and their own educational philosophies. For analyzing the relation between educational change and identity development, we use the concept of citizenship (Giroux, 1989; Van Gunsteren, 1992; Turner, 1993). For education for Democratic citizenship see for example Goodman (1992), Apple & Beane (1995) and O'Hair, McLaughlin & Reitzug (2000)

We distinguish three main types of citizenship: the adapting citizen, the calculating citizen, and the critical-democratic citizen (Veugelers, 2000; 2001). In the vision of the adapting citizen, a person has to accommodate to society and the traditional values it is trying to maintain. Changes in society are at best incorporated in traditional ways of life. The local community is celebrated, and in education the emphasis is on the traditional curriculum and on character education.

In the vision of the calculating citizen, society is a liberal market in which each idea and every person has to find his own way. The individual has his own responsibility and is accountable for its competences. It is a technical rationality based in a liberal and sometimes humanistic philosophy. In education, it emphasizes choice, individualization, self-regulation and accountability.

The vision of the critical-democratic citizen tries to combine individual and social development. A person is seen as a social being that actively participates in society and is critically engaged in the transformation of the community, in working with cultural differences. In this, a balance has to be found between personal development and social commitment and emancipation. The educational foundation for critical-democratic citizenship is critical pedagogy or critical theory and certain forms of cooperative learning and moral education.

Educational policy

Of course, in the concrete educational policies of governments, schools or teachers, one will not recognize these three types of citizenship in their pure forms. One will always see a specific articulation. We believe that at present in the philosophy of the policymakers the calculating citizen is the dominant form in the western world, but elements of the adapting citizen and the critical-democratic citizen are also part of that educational policy. We would like to describe this educational philosophy as it has been worked out in senior secondary education in the Netherlands.

From the vision of calculated citizenship (the dominant type of citizenship) it borrows:

- Stimulation of self-regulation of the students' learning processes;
- Support for individual learning routes and flexibility;
- Focus on learning skills;
- Stimulation of the use of information technology;
- Measuring student development on 'objective' assessment.

From the educational view of the adapting citizen it retains:

- The emphasis on traditional subjects;
- Traditional methods of assessment;

- Disciplinary practices;
- Keeping control over schools, educational goals and the learning process of students;
- Conformity to local community.

From the critical-democratic view, it incorporates to a certain extent ideas of:

- Authentic learning with space for personal signification processes and extracurricular activities;
- Critical thinking, but often in a formal, value-neutral way, not in a transformative way;
- Cooperative learning as a way to learn to work together;
- Attention for cultural differences.

These ideas show many similarities with the restructuring movement in the USA (Newmann, 1993; Lieberman, 1995). They have the same broad scope of theoretical possibilities; central in them is the more active learner and a constructivist vision on learning. But concrete educational policy practices may still differ a lot. The policy can even be to some extend different then the philosophy.

Schools have the freedom, within certain boundaries, to work out their own interpretation of national policy. They can, for example, focus more on the adaptive perspective, or they can emphasize the critical-democratic perspective.

Managing educational change

Western states today advocate greater autonomy for students, teachers and managers in educational institutions, while at the same time they pursue new structures to coordinate and control these trends toward autonomy. Greater autonomy is a bottom-up approach for empowering students, teachers and schools. Government is in a position to support these bottom-up developments by giving students, teachers and schools room to develop their own education. However, government may also apply a top-down approach to control and regulate the process of autonomy.

Two different theories about educational policy and school reform are working in parallel and they sometimes conflict (Darling-Hammond, 1992, 72). One theory focuses on tightening control: more courses, more tests, more mandatory curricula, more standards encouraged by more rewards and enforced by more sanctions. This is a top-down approach. The second theory devotes more attention to teachers' qualifications and capacities and to developing schools through changes in teacher education, licensing, certification processes, professional development and efforts to decentralize school decision making processes, while infusing knowledge, changing local assessment practices, and developing school and teacher networks. This is a bottom-up approach. On the whole, top-down approaches in school reform are fairly ineffective (Fullan, 1991). The implementation of true reforms requires support from teachers (Sikes, 1992). Reform should therefore also be directed at developing capacity, in particular in schools themselves (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). In actual school reform, these top-down and bottom-up processes work parallel and often interact. Analyzing changes in education requires attention to be given to the interplay of these top-down and bottom-up policies, or, in other words, to the interplay of control and extended autonomy (Hargreaves, 1994; Hartley, 1997; Datnow & Castellano, 2000).

Similar processes at different levels

In education, government sets out a cultural policy in which it steers the development of certain educational practices. But this policy allows schools room for developing their own interpretation of that policy: for formulating their own educational views, for making choices in the operationalization of the curriculum, and for organizing the learning process. To a certain extent it is a top-down operation: top-down first from the government to the schools, than from the principal to the teacher, and from the teacher to the learner.

Modern educational ideas as presented in the first part of this article ask however for an active learning process in which the learner co-construct his own education. At the micro-level there is therefore not only a top-down movement at play, but also a bottom-up movement from the learner to the curriculum and to the school. The concrete process on the micro-level of the learning process is a combination of top-down and bottom-up.

Similar processes can be seen to play at the level between the principal and the teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). The teachers together co-construct the curriculum, the culture and the organization of the school. On this meso-level too, there is a combination of top-down from principal to teachers and bottom-up from teachers to principal. Together they create the learning organization in which school development and professional development coincide. The same processes can be seen at work between the government and schools (Hartley, 1997).

Changing Secondary Education in the Netherlands

In 1988, the Dutch Ministry of Education started a restructuring process for senior secondary education. In senior secondary education, students of the age of 15-18 prepare themselves for a study at a university or polytechnic. There is a pre-university variant (VWO) and one for the polytechnics (HAVO). About 40% of the youngsters of that age group are in senior secondary education in the Netherlands. The other 60% are in vocational education.

In the Netherlands, the curriculum and assessments are centralized and well controlled by government. Only 30% of the secondary schools are public schools. The 70% 'private' schools consist of 25% Catholic, 25% Protestant and 20% with some special pedagogical vision like Montessori or Dalton. These 'private' schools are public funded and have to follow the national curriculum and assessments, but they do have some space for religious or humanistic education. All schools may appoint their own teachers and have some room for an own pedagogical vision and education.

The problems in senior secondary education at the end of the 1980's and in the beginning of the 1990's were formulated as:

- A lack of motivation among a lot of students;
- Traditional teaching methods;
- Insufficient flexibility in the school organization and teachers' tasks;
- Insufficient level of the curriculum;
- Too many choices between subjects for students.

The first half of the Nineties has seen a discussion of these problems and a search for 'solutions'. These solutions can be summarized with:

- Reduction of choice by introducing four learning 'profiles': culture, economics, health, technology;
- New curricula with higher standards and with more learning skills defined;
- More centralized assessments;

- Introducing new forms of teaching methods for more active learning;
- More opportunities for schools to organize their own way of teaching.

Before the new curricula were formally introduced in 1998, some schools experimented with the introduction of more learning skills in the curricula, new forms of teaching and other ways of organizing their education (more flexibility in the timetable and in grouping students). In 1998, all schools started with the new curricula, the profiles and the new exams. In this process of educational change we can roughly distinguish four periods (of course there is some overlap):

1988 – 1992 Analysis
1992 – 1995 Formulating possibilities
1995 – 1998 Experiments in schools, making the national curriculum and exams
1998 - 2004 Implementation of the new curriculum and exams

This is the educational context in which our network started and created a practice of change.

THE ARISING OF NETWORKS

In 1988, we started our network. We invited schools we worked with in earlier projects and schools that were partners in the teacher education of the University of Amsterdam. We started with discussing the first text published by the Ministry of Education on restructuring secondary education. This text was called 'Modularization of secondary education' and was really a technical approach to education so popular at the end of Eighties. The vision in it was that of a calculated citizen, but without any moral or pedagogical ideas.

In monthly meetings we analyzed this text and formulated a critique that we later discussed with several officials of the Ministry of Education. In this analysis and in the discussions, schools were also looking at their own school. They tried to find out which problem is being articulated in 'my' school and what kind of solutions 'we' want to work on.

Right from the beginning, we wanted to create a learning culture in which there could be a reflexive practice in which all participate. In which we could dream about possibilities, in which we could find communalities in experiences and in which we could support each other.

At that time, we were referring to our group as a 'workgroup'; at the beginning of the Nineties when our group became 'institutionalized', we called ourselves a 'network'. We believe that a network has to be constructed; you cannot just declare a network. People have to experience themselves that they have something in common and that they can contribute to each others' school development and professional development. After a few years working, we were able to formulate several functions our network has for the participants.

Functions of the network

Several functions distinguish our network (see also Veugelers & Zijlstra, 1995a; 1996a):

1. *Interpretation of government policies*

Discussions among teachers from different schools can provide greater insight into consequences and the various possibilities for restructuring education and implementing policy.

2. *Influencing government policies*

A network of schools can also try to influence government policies by giving feedback as a group.

3. *Learning from other's experiences*

In our view, learning from one another is the most important difference between professional development in networks and other forms of professional development.

4. *Using each other's expertise*

A participating school may invite expertise from another school or from the Center for Professional Development.

5. *Developing new educational approaches and materials*

Participants create products other schools can use. For example guidebooks, curriculum timetables, bring some coherence to the teaching of skills, or changing the moral climate in the school.

6. *Creating new initiatives*

In a true partnership, both schools and university can benefit from the collaboration and can develop new initiatives together.

When we compare the functions of our network with the characteristics of networks in the US as described by Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) and by Pennell & Firestone (1996), our network is focused more on policy, on analyzing policy, but also on trying to influence policy. In particular in the period of formulating solutions, our network had lots of meetings with officials of the Ministry of Education. At one point we received an invitation from the Minister of Education herself to talk about our ideas about assessment. The cause was that we had sent a letter to parliament, which wanted to bring up our point in their debates. The Minister, a social democrat, mentioned to us that educational traditionalists were already feeling threatened by her new policy proposals, and she hoped for our support and not creating a radical attack on her views. We regarded this even as a stimulation to oppose her policy and to counterbalance the traditional attacks on the restructuring ideas.

Organization and practice of the network

At present, 20 schools participate in the network. From each school two persons (usually one of them being a vice-principal) participate in the regular network meetings. These meetings are held once a month. The meetings focus on the educational vision of the schools, the school organization and the implementation process. Besides that, we also have thematic workgroups. First, in the period of experimentation, we had groups on career education, self-regulated learning, and moral and democratic education. Now, in the period of implementation, we have four working groups that are subject based: humanities, social studies and economics, health and technology, and career education. The former topics are now integrated in these groups. In each group, eight teachers from different schools participate. Beside the secondary school teachers, teachers of the University of Amsterdam are members of these workgroups. These groups focus on the content of the curriculum and on the pedagogical-didactical teaching methods. These groups meet six times a year. Furthermore we have two conferences each year. One of them is a meeting together of student panels of the schools. From the 20 schools, approximately 120 teachers have participated in the network over the past two years.

Staff members of the Center for Professional Development in Education chair these groups. Some of them, like the second author, are working in one of the schools of the

network but are hired by the University to chair groups in the network. The chair and three teachers from the schools prepare the sessions. The network facilitates these teachers for doing this work. All the meetings are on Thursday afternoons; half of the meetings are at the university, half are at different schools. These school based site visits are prepared together with the school.

In each meeting there is a specific topic. Someone gives a presentation of that topic, and together we reflect on that practice and everybody bring in their ideas and experiences. The presentations can be about plans, ongoing projects or evaluated projects. For the teachers, this is a kind of action research. We prefer to monitor such developments in the network or the workgroup. About every second year we bring examples of 'good practice' or a good description of failures together in a book. In each book we have about 20 different contributions. Teachers and principals write about their own practice. The four published books have sold quite well and have been important sources for other schools (Veugelers & Zijlstra, 1995b; 1996b; 1998b; 2001). For the first book, the network became in 1996 the first winner of the price for the best project in secondary education in the Netherlands. In particular the fact that

Networks in the Netherlands

Our network has been a model for starting more networks. A principal of one of our schools was assigned by the government to stimulate the start of networks nationwide. The government has been giving grants to start networks. By the mid Nineties, there were about 30 networks for secondary education in the country. The arising of more networks was an opportunity for schools to choose between networks. In our region, most of the more traditional protestant and catholic schools are member of an alternative network of the protestant university in Amsterdam.

Evaluation of the network

What participants appreciate in the network?

How do the participants assess the functions of the network? We asked our participants to indicate how the network provides the different functions for themselves (Veugelers & Zijlstra, 2001). According to the participants, the network mainly provides the functions of 'learning from other's experiences' and 'using each other's expertise'. Most respondents stress the importance of a joint interpretation of government policies, yet the chances of influencing government policies are considered minimal. Working together in the network can lead directly to a joint development of new initiatives. It is, though, a stimulus for new initiatives in one's own school and own practice.

In reply to a question regarding the differences between meetings of the network and traditional ways of teacher education, many respondents pointed at the importance of an exchange of experiences and learning from someone else's practices. The meetings were characterized by 'equality amongst participants who discuss experiences from a practical view and with emphasis on finding solutions.' The exchange of experiences was in no way limited to the Thursday afternoon meetings at the university. Most of the participants indicate that they also consult, phone, or visit each other outside the meetings to ask and give information. The network is mainly associated with active participation and continuity of activities, as 'giving and taking.' Traditional teacher education, on the other hand, is often 'passive' and oriented towards 'taking.'

Going in and out the network

Another important parameter for evaluation of the network is the participation of the schools. In 1989 we had 20 schools in the network. And now we have 20 schools again. Most of the schools are the same ones. But over time a total of 42 schools have been in the network for a longer or shorter period. Two groups of schools joined the network but left again. The first group was six schools to the north of Amsterdam, a rural and more traditional area. They were mixed with some other new schools in a new sub network. After a few years they left the network partly because they had to travel too much to get to Amsterdam, but also because of their educational philosophy. They themselves emphasize more adaptive ideas and less the critical-democracy ideas that is the dominant view of the network.

The second group was six gymnasia. They wanted to have a sub network of independent gymnasia. We agreed on that as an experiment for one year and we hoped that they would later on want to integrate more in the larger network and our working groups. For them too, the educational vision of the network was too critical-democratic and they found that schools that have different types (levels) of education in their schools dominated the network. Some of these schools also provide vocational training and there are even some comprehensive schools. For us, as directors of the network and for the old network schools, their departure was not a great problem. Schools that want to join our network are always welcome, but we do have our own educational vision. Of course there is space for other educational visions but within some common foundation. This foundation is not always well articulated but is the 'local color' of the network; it provides the boundaries of the educational vision. We are even proud that people recognize our vision and from a democratic and plural perspective it is good that they make the choice for their own vision.

But also some schools left because the participants found that their school had blocked their development and they felt that they could not contribute anymore to the network. We tried to support these people by accepting their passive participation for a while but mostly they left one or two years later, with the hope of coming back in better times.

A few schools left because they believed that they did not learn enough from the network. Mostly these schools themselves where not the most innovative schools. Two, for us interesting schools left because they prefer to concentrate on their own development; one of them is a Montessori school. So the network creates an identity that attracts schools and thrust out schools.

The network in its educational environment

Bottom-up flow in formulating possibilities and doing experiments

Networks are powerful tools in circumstances where schools have possibilities to shape their own education, when they can think and work together in finding out how education might be arranged. In the second half of the Nineties we had that opportunity in upper secondary education in the Netherlands. Schools could experiment with their pedagogical and methodological approach. Students, and sometimes parents, got involved in thinking about desirable changes and evaluated ongoing experiments. Despite a lot of criticism, the involvement of quite a lot of students became much better. Occasionally, student panels of different schools meet as a network. Also many teachers got involved in their school and in the network activities. People got a feeling of empowerment.

The type of citizenship teachers could officially work on was the calculating person, but a more humanistic version with emphasis on self-responsibility, creativity and personal development. There were also possibilities for a critical-democratic citizenship in cooperative learning and in students' own research projects in and outside schools.

Top-down restriction in implementation

The final curriculum with its high standards and centralized assessments that started in 1998 restricted the possibilities for restructuring secondary education. The content is strictly controlled by the central assessment and the curriculum is overloaded. Teachers really have to concentrate on time-on-task. They do not have much time for more experimental learning and they have to intensively monitor students' progress. Traditional subjects and traditional content in subjects maintained their position in the curriculum. All the new learning skills, the research activities for students and the more social oriented themes came on top of the traditional curriculum instead of being substitutions for parts of the old curriculum. When the Ministry had to diminish the overload in the curriculum, it even further reduced the new content.

Another restriction for a possible bottom-up process was the changes in assessment. More subjects are now being assessed nationally (for most of the students more than seven subjects). Even the school-based assessment is more strictly regulated. Schools themselves feel monitored too, because the role of the school inspectorate has been intensified. Teachers have the feeling that there is an enormous intensification of their work. And this is not only a subjective feeling.

The type of citizenship that is aimed for now is still that of the calculating person, but now a more adaptive one as a result of the traditional curriculum content and the intensive monitoring of students. The possibilities for a more critical-democratic citizenship are still there, but marginalized.

It is interesting to see that, for the common Dutch secondary school, there is compared with the era before more room for personal, humanistic and also more critical-democratic education. For the majority of Dutch schools, education has been changed to the better. But the opportunities for the more innovative schools like we have in our network, to shape their own education in more critical and democratic ways of learning, are even smaller than before under the old system.

Consequences for the network

For the network, all this means that the era of experimentation is over and that, now the time has come for implementing the new curriculum, schools have to defend their achievements. In the network the discussions are often about how still realize a more critical and democratic education with opportunities for students to do their own research projects and in choosing their learning activities.

The intensification of teachers' work and that of principals means that they have less time to come to meetings of the network. The schools that are still in the network want the network to continue, maybe with fewer meetings per year. They still appreciate working together and they want to benefit from the mutual trust and expertise in the network.

We needed this contextualization of the network in the educational landscape, because making and sustaining a network is not context-neutral. We have seen that a bottom-up movement in a period of exploring possibilities and experimentation provides better conditions for a network than a top-down movement during implementation. Also

schools must have the possibilities, the conditions and the subjective feeling that they can articulate their own educational vision, organization and pedagogical-didactical method. Networks can benefit from an educational and political climate in which schools can give their own interpretation of the national policy and the official curriculum. Where they can learn from differences and similarities.

It might be phrased in another way too. Networks can flourish in an era when people can have their educational dreams, when they can do their own projects, in which they can function together as a collaborative group.

In periods of a strong top-down movement, the strategy of a network is more defensive: defensive in its educational goals but also in its chances for survival. We still try to learn from each other, now more from the small steps each school takes. We also try to give participants in the network new possibilities to experience educational practices in other countries. For that we actively participate in The International Network of Networks for Democratic Education. With 20 teachers and principals we went to Finland the meet the networks of the universities of Helsinki and Tampere. And in March 2003 we went to visit the network of the Autonoma University in Barcelona.

And of course we work hard to get more room for a bottom-up approach in learning from students, in professional development and in school development. Maybe developments in society, the more 'objective' and the more ideological, force this bottom-up approach. The type of citizenship modern plural society needs cannot be only a calculating one, society has to organize its moral and democratic support, a type of citizenship that has to be needed must be more critical-democratic.

Developments in the network

But the development of the network depends not only on the educational policy. Internal factors are important as well. In this last part of the paper we will analyze them.

Shared ownership of the network

Schools and university both must have a feeling of ownership in the network. Networks cannot be organized top-down. In our network, we try to combine the influence of schools and the university on all levels. We have two directors (the two authors), one from one of our network schools and one from the university. Some of the groups are chaired by teachers or principals of the school. When we receive grants, a great part of the money goes to the schools so they can facilitate teachers to participate in the network and to do action-research. The agenda for the year program and for each meeting is formulated by all participants.

Most networks for secondary schools in the Netherlands that started in the Nineties, in the period of experimentation, stopped their work. Often they didn't succeed in sharing power in the network. And unfortunately some universities and Institutes for Professional Development of Teachers never had the intention of empowering the participants and in sharing grants. They wanted short time profit of money and research possibilities or they even still believe in top-down implementation strategies.

Important factors for networks to sustain successfully are:

- A shared ownership and a sense of belonging among all participants;
- An established tradition so it is really a decision to break;
- Continuation of participants;

- Being productive so participants receive concrete products and they themselves can show their own products;
- Finding new challenges all the time.

Network participation and the other teachers in the school
We believe that networks are powerful tools in restructuring education. But in the way we organized our network, only a small part of the workers in the school participate actively in the network. One might even say that we focus mainly on the management of schools and that we support those change-agents in their work. Although promoting democratic education, a network like we have supports in particular the most powerful people in the school. Other ways of school development and professional development have to be added to networking.

Extended professionalism
A final remark is about the professionalism that networks bring. Working closely together with colleagues of other schools can broaden teachers' perspectives. Teachers experience to be part of a larger educational community. It helps to see the particular and the common in your own educational experience. You have to reflect on your educational practice together with colleagues that become 'critical friends'. It gives you information about other practices. You know better what to do or what not to do in your classes and in your schools. You become a critical reflective practitioner. And in the dominant educational philosophy of the network we try to become to some extend a critical-democratic practitioner (Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Beyer, 1996). The network gives teachers a collective voice. Of course we realize that the network cannot realize all its intentions and neither can it explain all changes in the teachers' practice.

For university teachers and researchers working together with schools, a network forces them to make their theoretical notions more concrete. For them, participating in networks is a kind of action-research too. It gives them practical knowledge. The work relations between university based staff and school staff in networks is more equal than in traditional research or restructuring projects. Schools and universities can both benefit of this kind of partnership. For us, and then we mean all network participants, the challenge is now to continue under a less stimulating educational climate.

The paradox of flexibility in sustaining a network
We started the article with showing that modern society needs more flexible structures like networks. But the paradox of our network is that now the participants want to continue the network because of the structure we built together. Giving up the network now implies that you loose the foundations of collegial support that network gives to it participants. The network, despite its flexibility in arrangements and activities became a structure in its own. Some other network directors that failed in sustaining their network even blamed us in continuing the network.

Flexibility, balancing top-down and bottom-up, adjusting to the needs of all participants should keep the network as lively as possible. Finding new challenges and new ways of learning and professional and school development should steer the network.

Network rules
We will end by speaking about some rules we use in directing our network. Most of these rules are implicit in normal network practice.

1. Make the agenda together
2. Make a balance between formal and informal in the meeting
3. Have one or two special topics in each meeting and a lot of space for ongoing points and concerns
4. Have a calendar of dates for the whole year, so participants can plan their work
5. Show in planning the content of the year both structure and flexibility
6. Celebrate differences in ideas, experiences and concerns
7. Be aware of possibilities for each person to give voice to its ideas and experiences
8. We don't have a newsletter in the network because we communicate much by e-mail, regular mail and in meetings. A newsletter is too formal for our network
9. The network should enhance each individual educational practice
10. Personal professional development and school development have to go together
11. Network participants should communicate a lot with other persons in the school. Show them ideas and experiences coming from the network, and bringing their questions to the network, and sometimes these persons themselves
12. Communicate with the participants in an informal but well structured way
13. Balance between theory and practice; between inside the network and the outer world; between reality and idealistic thoughts
14. Communicate with the world outside the network by showing their the 'good practice' from the schools and the network itself (by means of publishing books and articles, giving workshops, and participating in public educational debate)
15. Try to develop an educational vision as network, but within this broad vision there must be possibilities for different ideas
16. Try to use the flow of educational change in a period of bottom-up processes for starting a network. Or try to use the fight against top-down processes to create spaces for opposite practices
17. Be flexible in the organization and activities of the network. Adjust to the network to new challenges without becoming an organization for its own sake.

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